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CHEAP REPOSITORY.

SUNDAY READING.

VIRTUE TRIUMPHANT;

OR,

The History of Queen Esther.



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VIRTUE TRIUMPHANT, &c.

IN the reign of king Ahasuerus the most beautiful virgins in the Persian dominions were, on a certain day, assembled, that he might chuse one to supply the place of Vasthi, his queen, whom he had divorced. Among this number was Esther, the niece of a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, who had been brought captive from Jerusalem. Esther had neither father nor mother, but was brought up by her uncle, Mordecai, to whom, as will appear by the sequel, she paid the obedience of a dutiful child. She was preferred by the king to all the other maidens, so that "he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vasthi." Ahasuerus celebrated his marriage with great pomp and rejoicings, inviting to it all the princes and

great men of the empire, to whom he distributed gifts proportionable to the dignity of a king.

Esther, by the advice of her uncle Mordecai, did not make known to the king of what people or kindred she was; he feared, perhaps, that the idea of her being of a captive nation might impede her advancement. Whatever might be his reason she implicitly obeyed him; for the scripture expressly says, that "*Esther did the commandment of Mordecai to be as when she was brought up with him.*" The passage affords a striking lesson of the obedience we owe to our parents, or to those who have performed to us the part of parents. Esther, though the wife of a great king, was not ashamed of listening to the advice of her uncle; she did not, as is the case of too many in performing the duties of a wife, forget those of a daughter: how eagerly do some young people the instant they marry, throw off the authority of a good parent; they forget the many tender attentions and marks of kindness they have received in their helpless years: the parents' assistance is no longer wanted, and therefore all obligations appear to subside; if advice is offered in any family concerns, it is rejected with rudeness, neglected with contempt; the kind solicitude of a parent is felt as a burden, and all interference deemed as out of time: such is the stupidity as well as the ingratitude of such characters, that they are insensible to the advantage arising (independently of religious motives, which must always teach us to cherish and honour our parents) from a friendly communication with age: they forget that experience is the mother of wisdom, and that to experience a parent adds an attachment so pure as to

above every interested view. Who then is so qualified to give advice?

A short time after Esther's marriage, Mordecai discovered a conspiracy between two of the king's chamberlains, who had laid a plot to take their master's life. Mordecai, informed Esther of it, and in his name warned the king of his danger; the matter was in consequence investigated, and, the charge being fully proved, the two chamberlains were hanged.

Above all the princes of the empire the king had advanced Haman; he held the highest posts in the empire, and all the lords of the court, in honour of the king, did reverence to the favourite. Mordecai despising the pride and arrogance of this man, did not pay him the same obeisance; this, by some envious persons of the court, was told Haman, who, observing that Mordecai did not make obeisance as he passed, was so highly incensed that he resolved to take vengeance not only upon the person who had offended, but on all the Jews that were scattered throughout Ahasuerus's dominions. With this blood-thirsty design he represented to the king that there were a people dispersed in different provinces of his dominions, who had among themselves distinct laws, and refused to submit to the laws established in the empire; adding, that it was not to the king's interest to tolerate them. By these insinuations he prevailed on the king to consent to a decree, ordering all the Jews, without distinction, to be destroyed: he took his ring from his finger, and, giving it to the favourite, told him he had full power to do as he had said. Haman,

therefore, dispatched writings to the king's lieutenants in the different provinces sealed with the king's ring, commanding them to be ready on a certain day to destroy all the Jews, both old and young, children and women, and to seize upon their effects. These orders were circulated throughout the provinces, that the people might be ready on the day appointed to begin the general massacre.

When Mordecai heard what was done he rent his clothes, and, according to the custom of the Jews when deeply afflicted, put on sackcloth with ashes on his head, and, running into the midst of the city in all the violence of grief, increased, no doubt, by the reflection that he was the cause of this general calamity, went and stood before the king's gate though it was strictly prohibited that any one should enter in mourning. This was told Esther by her attendants, and she, uneasy for her uncle's safety, sent her woman to take away the sackcloth and give him other raiment, but he refused it. She then sent to know the cause of his affliction. Mordecai then told the queen's chamberlain all that had happened and giving him a copy of the decree that had determined the massacre of his people, ordered him to shew it Esther, and charge her to go instantly and make supplication for them to the king. The chamberlain having reported these sad tidings to Esther, she ordered him to return and tell Mordecai, that he well knew there was a law in Persia which forbid any one, unless called, going to the king in the inner court, whether man or woman, on pain of death, and that she had not been called for thirty days past. When Mordecai received this

message he returned an answer dictated by the indignation he felt, that Esther should for a moment consider her personal safety when the lives of thousands of her people were at stake. His answer was this: "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews: for if thou holdest thy peace at this time, then shall deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, (or by other means) but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." This spirited admonition from one to whose advice and authority she had been accustomed implicitly to submit, had the desired effect. Esther was no doubt deeply impressed with the ruin that threatened her people, and ashamed of the selfish fears which had before seemed an obstacle to her intercession in their behalf, she sent her chamberlain back to assure Mordecai that notwithstanding the severe law that existed, she would cheerfully risk her life in behalf of her people; but she desired that he and all the Jews would make intercession for her with God, by fasting and prayer, in which she and her maids would previously join, justly reflecting that it was God alone that could give success to her endeavours, and enable her to defeat the malice of her enemies.

Having humbled herself before God, on the third day the queen put on royal apparel and stood before the king, as he was sitting upon his throne in the inner court, where, as observed before, it was not lawful for any one unsummoned to intrude: but God inclined the heart of Ahasuerus to be favourable to Esther; he no sooner saw her than he

extended to her the golden sceptre, as a token that her life was safe, upon which she drew near, and as the custom in such cases was, touched the top of it. The king then asked the cause of her visit, and declared that he would grant her request, were it even to the half of his kingdom; but Esther did not think proper at this time to prefer the cause of her people, she contented herself merely with requesting that the king would come to an entertainment which she had that day prepared, and bring with him Haman his chief favourite. Ahasuerus accepted the invitation, and ordered Haman to be apprised of the honour intended him, that he might be ready to attend at the queen's banquet.

When they were sat at the entertainment the king judging, perhaps, that Esther had some further design in the invitation, again asked what request she had to make, declaring, as before, that he would grant it, even to the half of his kingdom; but the queen, willing perhaps to establish, by the charm of her conversation, her influence over the king, that she might the more effectually counteract the machinations of the favourite, was satisfied with obtaining his promise to attend at a second banquet which she should prepare for them on the morrow.

Haman was highly elated with the honour conferred on him by the queen, who had never before invited any of the nobles; he left the palace full of joy and gladness; but perceiving, as he passed the king's gate, that Mordecai, who was sitting there, neither rose up, nor paid him any obeisance, he

indignation was again kindled against him; he contained it however at that time within his own breast, but when he got home he called for his wife Zereſh, and having enumerated to her and several friends the glory of his riches, the number of his children, and the superior honours to which he had been promoted, he told them that all these advantages afforded him no pleasure, while he saw Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate. How wretched is the state of the envious and malicious!

Haman, though surrounded with every blessing the world could bestow, was wretched while he saw the poor Jew enjoy that lowly quiet to which his own evil passions rendered him a stranger. Envy may justly be called it's own tormentor; it is in the mind that worm which never dies, but is continually gnawing and poisoning the sweeter enjoyments of life. Haman's power and riches naturally created him a number of flatterers, who, to gain their own ends, encouraged rather than checked his evil propensities; among these was his wife, who joined in advising him to have a gallows erected ready, and on the morrow to speak to the king and obtain his consent for Mordecai to be hanged upon it. This advice pleased Haman, who resolved to follow it, and had the gallows erected accordingly.

The providence of the Almighty so ordered it, that the king being unable to sleep, commanded the book of records, in which all the principal events of his reign were noted down, to be brought that he might peruse it. Among other events he found record of the conspiracy of the two chamberlains,

which Mordecai had overheard and made known to the queen, and by that means saved his life. Struck with this proof of his fidelity he enquired what dignity or honour had been conferred on Mordecai, as a reward for such an important service, and being answered by his attendants that nothing had been done for him, he enquired what ministers were in the court, that he might signify to them his pleasure. It happened at that moment that Haman was arrived to speak to the king concerning the execution of Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared: he therefore was called, and, upon his entrance, asked by the king in what manner he would advise the man to be treated, whom the king wished to honour?

Haman had received such repeated marks of the king's favour, that he could not think there was any one in his court whom he would wish to honour more than himself. Delighted therefore with this idea, he answered, that no greater honour could be conferred on such a one than to array him in the royal apparel, to set him upon the horse which the king was accustomed to ride, to place the crown upon his head, and cause one of the most noble princes of the empire to walk before him and proclaim aloud as he rode through the city, "That shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." Haman, puffed up with pride and arrogance, gave his master this advice, from his firm persuasion that it was himself whom the king wished to shew distinguished marks of favour and approbation: what then must have been his disappointment and chagrine, when the king ordered

take the royal robes, the horse and the crown, and go instantly and do as he had said to Mordecai the Jew, who sat at the king's gate, and not to omit the least tittle of what he had awarded him.

How ungrateful must this have been to the feelings of wicked Haman; he came with a view of obtaining from the king a decree for Mordecai's execution; and lo! he is deputed to exalt him to an honour even above what had been conferred on himself. There was however no appeal from the king's will: Haman, great as his malice was, was obliged to conceal it, and do according to the king's command. He took therefore the royal apparel, arrayed Mordecai in it, placed the crown upon his head, and, setting him upon the king's horse, led him triumphantly through the city, proclaiming as he walked before him, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour." What torment must it have been to the malignant spirit of Haman to do this to the man, whom of all others, was most the object of his detestation, and upon whom he was accustomed to look down as unworthy to lick the dust off his feet; but it is the delight of the God of peace to debase the proud of heart, and to exalt the humble and meek. What comfort must the Jews have received from these extraordinary honours conferred on their countryman; what was Haman's torment must have been their consolation, as they no doubt drew from it a happy presage concerning the revocation of the cruel mandate that was gone forth against them.

Mordecai was not like Haman; the uncommon

honours conferred on him by the king does not appear in the least to have raised in him any spirit of pride or self-importance, for we read that immediately afterward he returned to the king's gate where, it is probable, he possessed some humble post. Haman in the mean time, full of grief and indignation, repaired to his house, where, soon after, the king's chamberlain arrived to summon him to the queen's banquet.

When they were all seated at the entertainment the king again asked Esther if she had any petition to make, assuring her, as he had done before, that he would grant it, even to the half of his kingdom. Esther now thought it time to speak and replied, that her petition was for her own life and the lives of her people. "We are sold," said she, "I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish;" observing at the same time, that if it had been the king's will merely to have sold them for bond-men and hand-women she would not have complained against her enemy. The king, who it must be remembered did not understand that his queen was a Jewess, was astonished to hear her speak thus, and replied "Who is he, and where is he, that dare in his heart to do so?"

The queen answered, that her adversary and enemy was the wicked Haman, who was then before him.

Here was, no doubt, fresh matter for astonishment; Haman, conscious of his malicious intent

gan to tremble at the wrath which he perceived
 in the king against him: he took the oppor-
 tunity, while the king went into the garden of the
 palace, to petition the queen to intercede for his
 life; but he who had shewn no mercy to others
 was unworthy of it himself; his downfall was ren-
 dered complete by one of the queen's chamber-
 lains, who, on the king's return into the palace,
 as a farther testimony of Haman's guilt, told him
 that he had, at that very time, in his house a gal-
 lows fifty cubits high, which he had caused to be
 erected with a design of hanging Mordecai thereon,
 Mordecai who had been the means of preserving
 the king's life when the wicked chamberlains con-
 spired against it. This completed Haman's over-
 throw; for the king ordered him immediately to
 be hanged on the gallows he had prepared for
 Mordecai. This was accordingly done, and his
 house given by the king to Esther. She now no
 longer concealed from him the knowledge of her
 family, but informed him that Mordecai was her
 uncle; Mordecai was in consequence brought into
 the presence of the king, who took from his fin-
 ger the ring which he had before given to Haman,
 and afterwards remanded, and gave it to Mordecai,
 thereby delegating to him the same power Haman
 had before possessed, and so wickedly abused.
 Esther also bestowed upon her uncle Haman's house
 which had been given her by the king. Still it
 remained to reverse the bloody decree which had
 been issued in the king's name against the Jews.

Esther again, therefore, made intercession to the
 king, who gave Mordecai power to write in what

manner he pleased concerning the Jews, and seal it with the royal signet. He therefore sent patches to the lieutenants and rulers in the different provinces, countermanding the decree against Jews, and ordering them to grant them supplies defend them against any enemies that should rise to molest them. This edict carried joy and gladness in every province among the Jews, who overcome all their enemies, and were held in estimation by all the people; for Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went abroad throughout the land.

Queen Esther, by her wisdom and virtue, drew in favour with the king and people, and was happy in seeing her uncle Mordecai exalted to the highest posts in the kingdom; for he was second only to Ahasuerus himself.

In this eminent station it is natural to suppose that he promoted many of his brethren, and sought on every occasion, the welfare of his people; the scripture informs us, that he spoke peace to all his seed.

Such is the history of Queen Esther, from which two striking truths are exemplified; the fate of Haman affords a proof, of what frequently happens to the wicked, who, in digging a pit for innocent, frequently fall into it themselves, and shews us, that however dignified the station of an ungodly, it cannot give them peace, nor shield them from the judgement of their Creator, which sooner or later, certainly overtake them.

and exaltation of Esther and Mordecai, on the other
 and, forceably teach us, that the humble and op-
 pressed who call faithfully, serve God, and call
 upon him in the time of trouble, are his peculiar
 care, that he will lead them, as it were, by the
 hand, through all afflictions, protect them in all
 dangers, and finally, either in this world or the
 next, cause them to triumph over their enemies,
 and enjoy interrupted peace and felicity.



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